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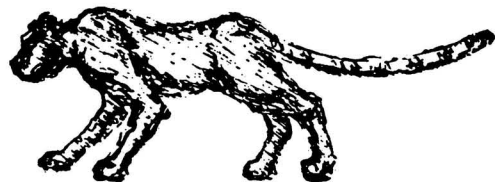
THE RIDDLES OF OZ

by TONY HEALY

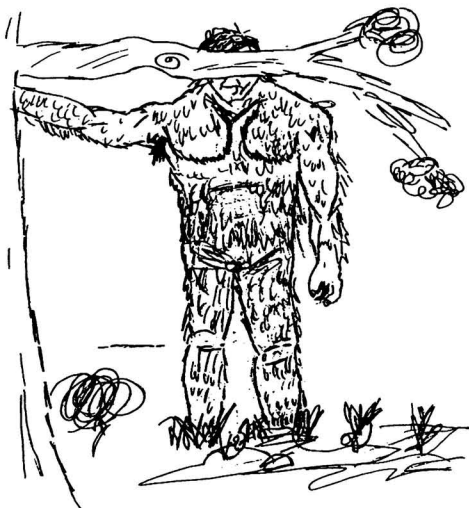
As most forteans already know, Australia wasn't exactly standing behind the door when God handed out the Mysterious Monsters. As well as our centuries-old Bigfoot-style mystery (the riddle of the hairy – and damnably elusive – Yowie), we have swamp and river monster legends (the dreaded Bunyips) plus a long tradition of Alien Big Cat (ABC) reports which are strikingly similar to the Surrey Puma / Exmoor Beast tales and the American "Black Panther" stories. FT has suggested that all you Bigfoot buffs, Nessie freaks and ABseers might like an update on the creature situation Down under. So here goes.

In FT44, Bob remarked that the ABC phenomenon is one of Britain's biggest contemporary unsolved mysteries. The same applies presently here in Oz: mystery moggie sightings, replete with bloody tales of stock depredation, are by far our most common type of alien animal report. They come in regularly from as far north as Cape York in Queensland; from coastal and central NSW; from Victoria and from many parts of Western Australia.

Oz big cats come in all colours, but are usually jet black. In an analysis of 70 randomly-selected reports, Paul Cropper, Australia's leading cat chronicler and Bunyip buster, found that the colour and pelt markings were: black 46 (65.7%); fawn / ginger / sandy / brown 14 (20%); grey / white 5 (7.1%); striped 4 (5.7%); spotted 1 (1.5%). Eyewitness guesstimates of size indicate that your average Aussie ABC is slightly larger than a German shepherd. Paul and I have paw-print casts ranging from cougar-size to leopard-size. Presently the hottest areas appear to be around Cordering in WA, where the "Cordering Cougar" continues – since about 1972 – to cut a bloody swathe through the local sheep population, and in the Kangaroo Valley (NSW) area.



'Leopard-like' big cat seen and sketched by zoologist Dr Per Seglen in Western Australia in 1982. *Perth Western Australian* 24 Aug 1982.



Yowie sketched by Adam Marion and friend after their sighting near Cooma (NSW) in 1982. The branch was approximately six feet six inches off the ground.



Kos Guines – Nemesis of Yowies.

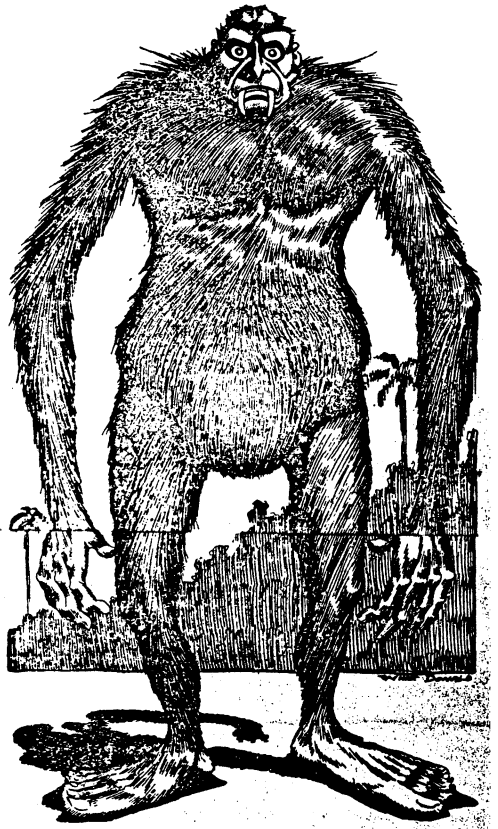
The best recent sighting in my own area occurred in November 1984, when a local fishing writer, Graham Pike (!), was quietly fly-fishing along the banks of Burra Creek, just 20 km south of Canberra. The time was 7 pm – broad daylight at that time of year. The range was 70 metres.

“It was lying next to the water on a large flat rock”, he said. “I think we spotted each other simultaneously.” The creature was dark reddish-brown in colour with sharp pointed ears, lynx-like mutton-chop whiskers, paws which seemed proportionately rather too large and a long sweeping tail. It seemed a little bigger than the proverbial German shepherd. After giving Graham a rather dirty look, the creature walked slowly away. “I could see it was no known big cat”, said the flummoxed fisherman. “It looked more or less like a cross between a lynx and a leopard.”

Encounters with the Yowie (aka Yahoo, Doolegard, Dulagal, Quinkin, etc.) [1] seem a lot rarer than those with ABCs, but when they do happen they can be pretty exciting – as when Kos Guines bumped into one near Pambula (NSW) in 1977. Mr Guines, rabbit hunting with his sons one bright summer evening, was walking quietly down a gully when he was startled by a crash in the bracken. “I swung round”, he told me, “anticipating perhaps a kangaroo, and saw a large hairy creature 30 metres away.”

At that time, Mr Guines, a Greek immigrant, had never even heard of the Yowie legend: “All I could think of was ‘My God! A gorilla!’” It was the height of a small man, “but much, much broader”. Its head sat right down on its shoulders in classic Sasquatch / Bigfoot style. Mr G let fly and blasted it in the back with his shotgun as it turned away, but it “didn’t even flinch or make a sound – just charged away through the bracken”. (Maybe after teleporting, tight-lipped and puce-faced through the cosmos, scattering falls of lead shot in its wake, it let out an almighty bellow on its arrival back in Canada – scaring the socks off Rene Dahinden and the local chipmunks.)

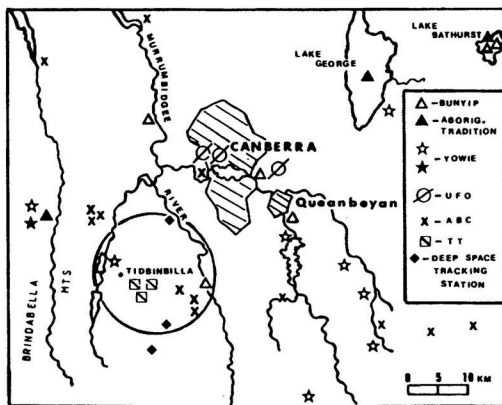
Modern Bunyip reports are as scarce as hens’ teeth, but some interesting stories came out of my local area last century, as when, in 1821, Hamilton Hume, one of Australia’s greatest explorers, told the Philosophical Society of Australia that he had seen something resembling “the manatee or hippopotamus” in swampy, 5 km-long Lake Bathurst [2]. Two years later, pioneer settler E.S.Hall stated that he had seen it too – and that it had a three-foot-long neck, a head like a bulldog and made a noise like a porpoise. He added that the local Aboriginals often told of encounters with the “devil-devil” which had a reputation for eating children [3].



A Yowie – “The Bombala Anthropoid – a specimen of the tribe, drawn by Will Diamond from a description given by Mr Charles Harper”. *The Sydney Sun* 10 Nov 1912.

The old Bunyip stories are frustrating in many ways. There seems no doubt that many Aboriginals and numerous white pioneers genuinely believed they’d seen awesome entities in various lakes and rivers; but, unfortunately, unlike the (in general) nicely uniform descriptions of Nessie, Ogopogo, Champ and co., the Bunyip descriptions are often bizarrely inconsistent.

The problem with Aboriginal witnesses - who described the creatures as resembling anything from emus to scaly quadrupeds - seemed to be that, as the anthropologist Brough Smith remarked in his *Aboriginals of Victoria*, “they appear to have been in such dread of it as to have been unable to take note of its characteristics”. The whites’ testimony was likewise very



AUSTRALIA'S MONSTER-HAUNTED CAPITAL

Map by Tony Healy.



Tiddinbilla Peak – Yowie/Panther/Bunyip/Thylacine country.

jumbled, in their case by many rather obvious hoaxes and tall stories.

About all that can be said with any confidence is that, although there are occasional references to humped backs or long necks, perhaps 40% of reports seem to describe something resembling a manatee or seal – though often rather hairier. Almost all the Bunyips of the Canberra area fell into this category, but since, to reach here via the Murray River system, seals would have to swim roughly 1,400 miles from the sea, I would say they would just about have qualified for OOPA status anyway.

Thanks to the work of John Keel, Coleman & Clarke, the Bords and many others, most fortians are now aware that in North America reports of Bigfoot, lake monsters and “black panthers” often seem – against all the odds of probability – to be tightly concentrated in rather small, well-defined areas. These same ‘window areas’ often produce reports of even weirder critters (mermaids, ‘little Indians’, Big Birds, etc.) as well as an inordinate number of UFO flaps. The same thing seems to happen here in Oz. As you can see from the map, my local area has Yowie and ABC reports mixed together and scattered rather liberally all over the place, interspersed with old Bunyip reports and the occasional UFO sighting [4]. While there is plenty to keep a cryptozoologist interested around Canberra (which is a small – population 250,000 – city bounded by grazing land, scrub and the huge mountainous wilderness of the Namadgi-Kosciusko National Park), it is certainly not the hottest area in the country for alien animals.

There is one local spot, however, which may come close to being a ‘window area’. It is worth looking at, in any case, because it provides an

example of a type of alien animal report unique (almost) [5] to Australia. The circle drawn on the map, covering a radius of 10 km in the vicinity of Tiddinbilla, encompasses not only three ABC reports, one Bunyip and one Yowie (plus several other unmarked rumours and ‘possibles’), but also three very closely-grouped Tasmanian Tiger (Thylacine) sightings.

The main ‘tiger’ eyewitness, National Parks ranger Peter Simon, who has patrolled the area for the last seven years, is adamant that the creature that he observed – at a range of 30 metres, in broad daylight, for several seconds – could have been nothing but a Thylacine.

While the TT – a distinctively striped marsupial wolf – may or may not be extinct in Tasmania (where no one has succeeded in trapping, shooting or photographing one since the 1930s), it is definitely in the alien animal category on the mainland. I have four reasons for saying this:

- 1 – Palaeontologists agree that it became extinct on the mainland several thousand years ago, after the Aboriginals introduced the dingo.
- 2 – Alleged modern mainland sightings are never provable and sometimes occur in suspiciously close proximity to other types of AA reports (e.g. in Western Australia several TT reports have come from the epicentre of the ‘Cordinger Cougar’ activity.)
- 3 – The testimony of mainland TT eyewitnesses occasionally contains slightly ‘odd’ elements which are reminiscent of some of the weirder types of BHM, ABC and lake monster reports. According to the *Perth Sunday Express*, 25 June 1982, for instance, Syd and Ian Slee, who have had fowls and kangaroos killed – and decapitated – by TTs, say that they know



The Bunyip

A Bunyip – as imagined by the illustrator Henry Ford in Andrew Lang's *Brown Fairy Book* [1904].

the Thylacines are around when they get a 'prickly feeling' in the hairs on the back of their necks.

● 4 – Hunting dogs, which enthusiastically assisted man in slaying the Thylacines in Tasmania, sometimes show uncharacteristic yellow streaks on facing the mainland variety. The night after his sighting near Tidbinbilla, for instance, Ranger Simon staked out the area and heard, coming from the bush, very strange harsh panting sounds. His dogs, which have been in at the death of over 300 wild pigs, absolutely refused to get out of the truck.

As well as the occasional tight geographical pattern, as at Tidbinbilla, there may be a rough chronological pattern to Oz AA reports. As long ago as 1940, a pioneering Australian cryptozoologist, Mr R.McKay, a man way ahead of his time, noticed the connection between ABCs and Yowies. Paul Cropper has in his files a letter from Mr McKay to a Mr Estoppey dated 22 April 1940:

Dear Mr Estoppey,

Many thanks for your letter... re panther seen at Trentham... perhaps these animals come in waves... I'm sure that before long you will hear of a big gorilla-like animal somewhere in Gippsland.

In a very general way, Paul Cropper's enormous AA files and statistics tend to agree with Mr McKay's 'wave' theory:

● 1 – Bunyip sightings, all the rage from the 1820s to about the 1880s, have hardly been reported at all this century.

● 2 – Although dramatic outbreaks of Yowie activity still occur, the hey-day of the Oz BHM seems to have been from the early 1870s to about 1912.

● 3 – Oz ABCs, though mentioned in northern Queensland as early as 1871 [6], didn't really get their act together until the 'Emmaville Panther' massacre (sic) of the early 1960s. Since then they have gone from strength to strength.

Could it be that the mainland TT reports, which apparently began about ten years ago [7] and appear to be increasing, will turn out to be the new wave which will supersede ABCs on the Oz AA scene? Only the Cosmic Zookeeper knows for sure.

In fact, come to think of it, there may be an even newer phenomenon starting to peek through southern window areas. Paul Cropper's favourite hunting ground, the Kangaroo Valley area, has recently produced – in addition to many and various reports of ABCs, Bunyips, UFOs, little people, TTs and Yowies – a full-fledged BVM outbreak, complete with apparitions, seers, cures and a holy spring. I'll leave that story for Paul to tell in a later update from Oz.

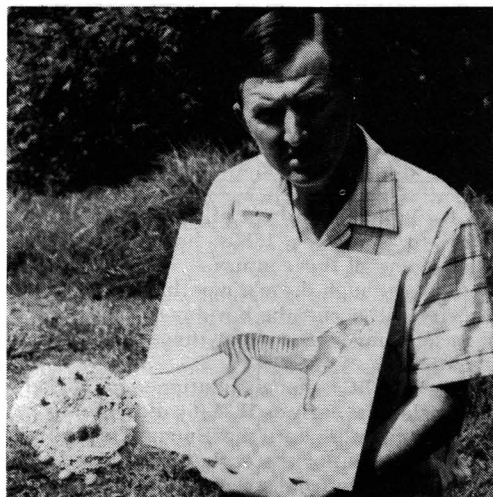
NOTES OVERLEAF

NOTES

■ 1 - Other Yowie aliases can be found in Graham Joyner: *The Hairy Man of South-Eastern Australia*. ■ 2 - Bernard Heuvelmans: *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, p.134. ■ 3 - *The Sydney Gazette* 27 Mar 1823. ■ 4 - For those who think they may be of significance, I have marked the location of three deep-space tracking stations which beam out huge amounts of microwaves in the Tidbinbilla area. I've also shown that the area is bounded to the north and west by water reservoirs, and to the east by one of Australia's largest rivers. It might also be worth mentioning that by Oz standards the Canberra area is fairly active seismically. ■ 5 - On 7 April 1974, Joan Gilbert reported seeing a Thylacine crossing Western Avenue, Branksome, Dorset (*Bournemouth Evening Echo* 7 April 1974; *Alien Animals* p.59; FT9, p19). ■ 6 - *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, p.142. ■ 7 - There are a few earlier 'tiger' stories: Paul Cropper has a single report from 1949 plus notes on a small outbreak in the 1960s.

ON THE TRAIL OF A 'TIGER'

by REX GILROY



Rex Gilroy holds a thylacine sketch and a plaster cast of one of two sets of tracks found near the Grose Valley, identified as thylacine.



Wilfred Batty with the last known 'tiger' shot in the wild. [From Beresford and Bailey: *Search for the Tasmanian Tiger* 1981.]

In June 1984, accompanied by my wife and a film crew, I was dropped by helicopter into a remote area of northern Tasmania, to investigate a report that a small colony of the Tasmanian 'tiger', or Thylacine, existed there. The expedition drew a blank, as in the past, but the search goes on.

For 25 years I have been searching the Australian bush for living proof that this "extinct" creature still survives on the mainland. There are three reasons why I believe this search is worthwhile. First, there are a lot of reports of large striped dog-like animals, possibly thylacines, coming from over a wide area of the rugged eastern Australian mountain

ranges, from far north Queensland through New South Wales to eastern Victoria. Second, plaster casts have been made of tracks found on the mainland which compare with others from Tasmania, leaving little doubt as to the animal's identity.

Third, I had a personal sighting of a thylacine. At 10.15 pm on 22 February 1972, a friend and I were driving along the Great Western Highway just south of Blackheath towards Katoomba in the rugged Blue Mountains west of Sydney, New South Wales. As we passed thick roadside scrub, an animal almost the size of a full-grown Alsatian dog, with fawn-coloured fur and a row of blackish stripes, ran across the highway in front of the car. For a few seconds it stood there in the glare of the headlights before running off into the scrub, towards the Grose Valley nearby. I have no doubt that it was a thylacine: its appearance matched that of